

[Pioneer Life]

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Title Pioneer life

Place of origin Portland, Oregon Date 3/3/39

Project worker Sara B. Wrenn

Project editor

Remarks

Form A

Circumstances of Interview

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker Sara B. Wrenn Date March 3, 1939

Address 505 Elks Building, Portland, Oregon.

Subject Pioneer Life

Name and address of informant Mrs. Sarah L. Byrd 1537 N. E. 13th St., Portland, Oregon

Date and time of interview February 28, 1939 1:30-3:00

Place of interview Home, at above address

Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant

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Mr. Gearhart, Clergyman, Community Church, Oak Grove (Nephew)

Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you —

Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

Plain, comfortably furnished living room of the usual type: over-stuffed furniture, plain rug, radio, few pictures, fireplace with no fire. No individuality. Old and rather shabby square house of two-stories; enclosed verandah in front, in which the daughter, Miss Byrd, maintains her chiropody practice. A small yard, with no particular evidence of care. The neighborhood is but a block from the business artery of Broadway, East Side, with modest homes and apartments, most of them rather old.

Form B

Personal History of Informant

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker Sara B. Wrenn Date March 1, 1939.

Address 505 Elks Building, Portland, Oregon

Subject Pioneer Life

Name and address of informant Mrs. Sarah L. Byrd 1537 N. E. 13th St., Portland, Oregon

Information obtained should supply the following facts:

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1. Ancestry
2. Place and date of birth
3. Family
4. Places lived in, with dates
5. Education, with dates
6. Occupations and accomplishments with dates
7. Special skills and interests
8. Community and religious activities
9. Description of informant
10. Other points gained in interview

1. Father, Philip Gearhart; Mother, Margaret Logan Gearhart Ancestral stock; German-French-Irish and English.

2. Iowa. 1843.

3. Widow for 45 years, living with only child, a daughter of about 50. Deceased husband, Frank N. Byrd. Four children deceased.

4. Aside from two years in California and five or six years in Washington, life, since age of 5 years, has been spent in Oregon, chiefly in Clatsop County.

5. Such district schools as were available.

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6. Home-keeper, much of the time "doing the work of a man" on farm.
7. Interested in everything of a general nature. No special interests.
8. No church affiliations. Brought up a Presbyterian. Member Townsend Club.
9. Small, wiry and active, with weather-beaten, wrinkled skin, bright eyes and plenty of gray hair. Neatly dressed and cordial in manner. As "chipper as a little chipmunk."
10. Mrs. Byrd's memory proved to be somewhat impaired as to dates.

Form C

Text of Interview (Unedited)

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker Sara B. Wrenn Date March 1, 1939

Address 505 Elks Building, Portland, Oregon

Subject Pioneer Life

Name and address of informant Mrs. Sarah L. Byrd 1537 N. E. 13th St. Portland, Oregon

Text: I ain't no hand for dates, so don't bother me about 'em. I do remember though when we came to Oregon. We came from I-O-WAY in 1848. That's a long time ago, ain't it? Joe Watt was captain of our train. Bein' so little, I don't remember how many wuz in the train, but I've heard 'em say it wuz a big one. Every night when we camped the wagons wuz

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pulled in a circle an' hooked together with chains an' oxen yokes. The folks camped inside that circle, an' close along-side wuz the stock, an' a guard wuz set up for the night.

Yes, it must hev ban an awful job cookin'. I wuz too little to do anything. 'Course they hed to cook on the open fire, an' on the plains, most o' the time ther wuz nothin' to burn but buffalo chips. I guess they got us'd to it, but I wouldn't like to.

The Indians wuz peaceable when we cum across. We didn't hev eny trouble o' any kind. Oh, once, I b'lieve the Indians stole a cow or somethin'. But the biggest excitement I c'n remember is a herd of stampedin' buffalo thet almost got us. It was dusk, an' we'd gone into camp, when, all at once, 'way off in the distance we see a big cloud o' dust. It cum near'r an' near'r, an' perty soon 2 somebody yelled, "It's buffalo — looks like a million of 'em, an' they're comin' this way." Mebbe ther wuzn't a fuss then. Everbody wuz shoutin' to everbody else, an' givin' orders, an' rushin' 'round like crazy people. Some o' the men got out on horses, an' some way or 'nother, what with ther yellin' an' wavin' whatever they cud get hold of, they kept the buffalo from comin' thru the camp. I c'n remember it all ez plain ez day, seein' them buffalo tear by, with their tails up an' ther heads close to the ground. Ther must 've ben a hunderd or more. That's a long way from a million, but the ground jest shook as they went by. Some o' the men got some good shots, an' we had plenty o' buffalo meat for awhile.

Bein' so little I can't remember very much about crossin' the plains. When we first got here we went to Oregon City an' stayed for a while. When we started from I-o-way father meant to go to Californy, but when they got to wher the roads parted to Oregon an' Californy, he came to Oregon. When we wuz in Oregon City we wuz perty close to wher Doctor McLaughlin lived. I remember seein' a squaw out in his yard. She wore dresses, but she had bare feet. I remember thet, an' I remember hearin' 'em say thet wuz Doctor McLaughlin's wife. Ther wuz a man named Jewett in Oregon City thet father knew in I-o-way, an' he got to tellin' father 'bout the Clatsop Plains country, so father decided he'd go down ther. Ther wuzn't any roads then, o'course — jest Indian trails. Finally it wuz decided

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father an' my oldest brother would drive the stock down over the trail. I think he hed a cow, a yoke o' oxen an' two horses, an' Mr. Jewett tuk mother an' the rest of we young'uns down the river. We went in a big Indian canoe, with two Indians to paddle it. Goin' down the Willamette we passed a place where ther wuz a few cabins, an' Mr. Jewett sed, "That's Portland." Mother al'ays laughed when she tol' that. Oregon City wuz a lot bigger then. I wish I c'd remember thet trip 3 down the Columbia. Jest mother, we three young'uns, thet strange man, an' the two siwashes, in a canoe on that big, lonesum river. It tuk sever'l days o' course, an' we had to camp at night, an' I remember once when we wuz climin' ashore on a log I perty near fell in. I wuz scared nigh to death. We went up the Skipanon River frum Astoria, wher father settled an a squatter's claim. It wuzn't surveyed then. They jest had squatter's claims. We jest camped at first, an' then father built a log cabin with shake roof, an' a fireplace made o' sticks an' mud. It hed a floor too, sort o' what you'd call a puncheon floor I guess — logs hewed flat on all sides an' put together. We'd brought two chairs across the plains thet father'd made in I-o-way. They hed cowhide seats in 'em. Later on. here in Oregon, he put rockers on 'em, an' they wuz al'ays father an' mother's chairs. Father c'd make furniture real good. He made tables an' cupboards an' benches, real good they wuz. We c'd be usin' them yet if they hadn't got burned up. I still got one o' the li'l ol' rockin' chairs down on the farm.

They wuz lots o' elk down in thet country in them days, an' we got salt an' pervisions from the Hudson's Bay Co. No, we never used salt from that ol' salt cairn. Mother brought all kinds o' garden seed from I-o-way, an' the next year we had a good garden. Before the gold excitement wuz over in Californy we wuz sendin' butter down on the boats to the miners. I remember hearin' the folks say they got a dollar a pound fer butter, an' \$5.00 a barrel for potatoes. I guess folks'd like to get thet much now fer butter an' potatoes.

'Course we us'd to make our own lights then. They wuz wick candles. The way we made 'em wuz to take wicking out the length of a candle, an' through a loop made at each end o' the wicking we'd put a stick. Then, holdin' 'em by the stick at each end — mebbe there'd be half a dozen or more wicks — we'd dip 'em in melted tallow. As soon as they'd harden

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we'd dip 'em again, doin' it over an' over 'til the candles wuz big enough to use. My! but didn't coal oil lamps seem wonderful 4 when we got to usin' 'em. An' wuzn't I glad, 'cause I al'ays hed to help make the candles, soon as I wuz big enough. No, them candles wuzn't very good light, but ev'rybody went to bed early then — an' got up early too. Ev'rybody hed chores an' work to do - an' ther wuz plenty o' work I can tell you. All the cookin' o' course wuz done at the fireplace. Meat wuz roasted by putting a big piece o' tin in front o' the fire. It wuz a sort o' reflector; the meat wuz put between it an' the fire, an' you never tasted anythin' better then meat roasted that way. Bread an' pies and cake all wuz baked in the dutch oven, a big iron, round kettle that sat on short legs an' hed a long handle, an' a lid thet curved up 'round the edges. The kettle wuz set on coals, an' coals an' ashes wuz heaped on the lid.

Later, when we got pigs, father smoked ham an' bacon for the winter. First after the hogs wuz killed, he'd make a heavy salt brine, then he'd rinse the hams an' sides in thet, an' then hold build a fire on the ground o' the smoke house an' hang the hams an' sides over it, an' thet would go on fer days an' days. 'Course he didn't hev only just fire enough to make a good smoke, an' he never us'd anythin' but crabapple or alder; mostly it wuz wild crabapple.

No, we didn't hev much amusement when I wuz a young girl. It wuz wicked to do most anythin' in them days. My father thought cards an' dancin' wuz the devil's own. Down on Clatsop Plains wuz where the Presbyterians built their mission, you know, I don't remember much about that. I think a Mr. Lewis Thompson started that. But I remember how good everybody wuz. I us'd to hear about a boy that went fishin' one Sunday to a place called Stanley Point. He caught a salmon, an' he had to pass the church goin' home with it an' his folks wuz there an' they scolded him terrible. He wuz tellin' somebody about it, an' they ask'd him what they did with the salmon, an' he sed, "Why they et it — they et every bit of it." The Presbyterians us'd to preach fire an' brimstone all right, an' so did the Methodists and 5 the Baptists when they cum. Once at a campmeetin' at Skipanon all the people wuz down on their knees prayin' an' groanin' an' the preacher an' the saved were

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goin' about, puttin' their hands on the folks kneelin' an' sayin' "The Lord bless you," "Thank the Lord, came to glory," an' all over the place you old hear "Amen! Amen! Amen!" It wuz jest terrible an' I wuz just about scared to death.

When we went to school it wuz in an ol' log house, an' there wuz an empty room, an' there we young uns learned to dance. All the music we had wuz an ol' jewsharp one o' the boys had, an' he could play it perty good. But what made me mad wuz when my father, after he got along in years, learned to dance. Can you beat that? I wuz 17 or 18, an' there wuz a dance in Ross Hall at Astoria, an' father took sister an' me to the ball, an' he paid \$5.00 a ticket. I al'ays did resent that, even though it wuz a grand ball, all decorated an' everythin'. We waltzed some, but mostly it wuz square dances and the Virginia Reel.

I ought to be awful good, but I'm not. It al'ays made me mad when a preacher put his hand on my shoulder an' sed, "An' how is it with [your?] soul, sister?"

My husband died 46 years ago. I wuz on a farm, an' after he went I stayed there, lookin' after the stock, an' plowin' on, gettin' in the hay, jest like a man. My daughter, Dick, the only one of my children left, wuz with me, an' we did everythin', jest havin' a hired man to run the mowin' machine mebbe. Sometimes me milked from eight to ten cows, an' we made butter an' sent it to Astoria.

Yes, it wuz my father thet first owned all of what is now Gearhart. After father died my oldest brother administered the estate, an' he sold the property to Mr. Kinney, who first started a resort there. It wuz Ben Holliday who started the first resort down that way though — the one at Seaside. He built a big wooden hotel an' he had a quarter-mile race track, an' then his friends 6 begin to come down from Portland, an' they would have horse races. My! I c'n remember seein' them people when they first got there. The roads wuz so dusty, an' their faces wuz jest like a siwash. Thet ol' hotel stood there a long time. It wuzn't so many years ago it burned down.

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I us'd to talk jargon like a siwash. Once down at Gearhart some ladies wuz visitin' me, an' they c'd talk jargon too. We had lunch, an' we wuzn't to say anythin' but in jargon. One of 'em, Mrs. Vantine, wuz perty good, so I sed to her, "Potlatch nika mika seopose" (Give me your hat) First she looked kinda puzzled, an' then, all at once she smiled an' took off her hat an' giv it to me.

Well, I'm gettin' a little old — 96 years my next birthday, but I feel chipper as a chipmunk, an' I jes like to see anybody call me "Grandma" thet I ain't "grandma" to.

Form D

Extra Comment

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

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Name of worker Sara B. Wrenn Date March 1, 1939

Address 505 Elks Building, Portland, Oregon

Subject Pioneer Life

Name and address of informant Mrs. Sarah L. Byrd 1537 N. E. 13th Street, Portland, Oregon.

Comment:

Mrs. Byrd was remarkably clear-minded for a woman of 96 years, but she was very nervous, making it necessary to refrain from as few questions as possible, as questions seemed to confuse her. The interviewer had hoped to gather considerable information

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on the Presbyterian Mission of Clatsop Plains, but of this Mrs. Byrd could remember practically nothing.

(Use as many additional sheets as necessary, each bearing the heading given above).